

## CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A computer system for distributed collaborative computing, the system comprising:

5 a plurality of server computers connected to a plurality of client computers via a global-area computer network;

a high-speed direct connection link connecting the plurality of server computers; and

10 a computer program executable by the server computers, wherein the computer program comprises computer instructions for:

establishing a connection over the global-area computer network between one of the server computers and one of the client computers;

15 establishing a communication link between the server computer and one of the other server computers over the high-speed direct connection link; and

20 conducting an on-line conference among an arbitrary number of the client computers connected to an arbitrary number of the server computers.

25

2. The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

30 sharing an application program executed on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

3. The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

5 viewing a document stored on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

4. The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

10 detecting a failure of one of the server computers handling the on-line conference;  
disconnecting the failed server computer from the on-line conference;  
15 connecting another of the server computers to the conference; and  
resuming the on-line conference.

5. The computer system of claim 1, further comprising a database, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

storing information about the status of the on-line conference in the database.

25 6. The computer system of claim 1, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

ensuring that a maximum number of authorized conference participants in not exceeded.

30

7. A method of operating a distributed collaborative computing system comprising a plurality of server computers, the method comprising:

5 establishing a connection over a global-area computer network between one of the server computers and a client computer;

10 establishing a communication link between the server computer and one of the other server computers over a high-speed direct connection link; and

conducting an on-line conference among an arbitrary number of the client computers connected to an arbitrary number of the server computers.

15 8. The method claim 7, further comprising:

sharing an application program executed on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

20 9. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

viewing a document stored on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

25 10. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

detecting a failure of one of the server computers handling the on-line conference;

disconnecting the failed server computer from the on-line conference;

30 connecting another of the server computers to the conference; and

resuming the on-line conference.

11. The method of claim 7, wherein the distributed collaborative computing system further comprises a database and the method further comprises:  
5 storing information about the status of the on-line conference in the database.

12. The method of claim 7, further comprising:  
ensuring that a maximum number of authorized  
10 conference participants in not exceeded.

13. A computer-readable storage medium storing a computer program executable by a plurality of server computers, the computer program comprising computer  
15 instructions for:  
establishing a connection over a global-area computer network between one of the server computers and a client computer;  
establishing a communication link between the  
20 server computer and one of the other server computers over a high-speed direct connection link; and  
conducting an on-line conference among an arbitrary number of client computers connected to  
25 an arbitrary number of the server computers.

14. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 13, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:  
30 sharing an application program executed on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

15. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 13, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

5           viewing a document stored on one of the client computers on an arbitrary number of other client computers.

16. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 10 13, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

          detecting a failure of one of the server computers handling the on-line conference;  
          disconnecting the failed server computer from  
15       the on-line conference;  
          connecting another of the server computers to the conference; and  
          resuming the on-line conference.

20       17. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 13, further comprising a database, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

          storing information about the status of the on-line conference in the database.

25

18. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 13, wherein the computer program further comprises computer instructions for:

          ensuring that a maximum number of authorized  
30       conference participants in not exceeded.